

Second Sunday of Easter Feast of Divine Mercy

I'll be exploring a devotion that is presently sweeping across the world, and the visionary who initiated and promoted it. The devotion is called Divine Mercy and is based on the visions given by Christ to a Polish nun named Sr. Maria Faustina Kowalska.

Sister Faustina was born Helena Kowalska on August 25th, 1905 in the village of Głogowieg, central Poland. She was born into a poor but devout Catholic family, the third of ten children. At 20, she joined the *Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy* Congregation in Warsaw and lived as a member of this order until her death on October 5th, 1938. Throughout her life, Sr. Faustina manifested a strong devotion to God's mercy and promoted this devotion to everyone she encountered. She was also a mystic and visionary. The saintly life she demonstrated initiated, after her death, a study of her life, for the purpose of possible beatification and canonization in the future.

Among the records that were studied concerning the life of Sr. Maria Faustina Kowalska, the most important were her diaries. From 1934 to 1938, Sr. Faustina kept a diary which was written as a personal journal and eventually filled six notebooks. In these notebooks one finds descriptions of her deep union with God, along with her many visions and revelations, particularly those associated with God's mercy.

In her diary, Sr. Faustina described an apparition she received on February 22nd, 1931, which became the origin of the Divine Mercy Icon:

In the evening when I was in my cell, I saw the Lord Jesus clothed in a white garment.

One hand [was] raised in the gesture of blessing...From beneath the garment...there were emanating two large rays, one red, the other pale...After a while,

Jesus said to me, Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature:

Jesus, I trust in You. I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel,

[then] throughout the world. (St. Marie Faustina Kowalska, *Diary: Divine Mercy in My Soul* (Stockbridge, Massachusetts: Marians of the Immaculate Conception, 2002), 24.)

The two different coloured rays, Sr. Faustina later described, represented the blood and water proceeding from Jesus' side when he was pierced by a spear after his death on the cross (John 19:34). Jesus reminded Faustina that "These rays shield souls from the wrath of My Father. Happy is the one who will dwell in their shelter, for the just hand of God shall not lay hold of him." (ibid, 139). Jesus then reminded Faustina of his desire "that the first Sunday after Easter be the Feast of Mercy". (ibid)

The painting of the original Divine Mercy Icon disappointed Sr. Faustina to the degree she broke down in tears because, despite the skill of the painter, he could not capture in his painting the beauty, compassion and mercy that she saw in the apparition she received. Despite this deficiency, this painting has become the model for Divine Mercy Icons to follow.

Devotion to the Icon of Divine Mercy also includes praying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. The origin of the Chaplet comes from an apparition Sr. Faustina received on September 13, 1935. In

her vision, an angel, acting as a mediator of God's divine wrath, was about to strike the earth. Faustina found herself directly before God, entreating Him to thwart the avenging angel by means of the following prayer: "Eternal Father, I offer You the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ for our sins and those of the whole world; for the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us". (ibid, 207) She records in her diary that the avenging angel was left helpless in response to this prayer. The following paragraph then described how the Chaplet's other prayers are then to be recited on rosary beads.

In September of 1936, Jesus, in a vision recorded by Faustina in her diary, reminded her again of the efficacious nature of the Divine Mercy Chaplet:

Say unceasingly the chaplet that I have taught you. Whoever will recite it will receive great mercy at the hour of death...Even if there were a sinner most hardened, if he were to recite this chaplet only once, he would receive grace from my infinite mercy...I desire to grant unimaginable graces to those souls who trust in my mercy. (ibid, 282)

The greatest gift of grace and mercy, however, were related to Sr. Faustina on another occasion, again in September of 1936. Jesus reminded her that all who go to confession and receive holy communion on the Second Sunday of the Easter Season "shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. On that day all the divine floodgates through which grace flow will be opened. Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet". (ibid, 286)

The significance of the preceding promise was not lost on the author of the following quotation:

*According to this great promise, Jesus is offering all souls a chance for a new "baptism" each year, giving everyone an opportunity to "wipe the soul clean". If a soul, taking advantage of this great gift in all sincerity and with proper contrition, was to die after receiving Holy Communion, on the Feast of Mercy and before committing another sin, they would go immediately to Heaven, **without anytime in Purgatory—regardless of past life**. There seems to be no other meaning to this promise of our Lord. This is the unbelievable and little understood love and mercy of God for sinners" (Handbook of Devotion to the Divine Mercy (Dublin, Ireland: Divine Mercy Publications), 22.)*

The promotion of Devotion to the Divine Mercy reached an impasse in 1959 when the Vatican prohibited its spread due to the receiving of inaccurate information. On April 15th 1978, however, the Vatican rescinded this earlier ban, largely because of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, the Archbishop of Krakow. Six months later, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła would be elected Bishop of Rome by his fellow cardinals and take the name John Paul II.

This was not the first time Pope John Paul II and the message of Divine Mercy would providentially cross paths. In 1965, He initiated the process that concluded with Sr. Faustina's beatification in 1993. The Pope then followed Sr. Faustina's beatification with her canonization

in April 2000, the first saint to be canonized in the third millennium. The Pope also established Divine Mercy Sunday for the universal Church that same year. Perhaps as a nod to God's inexplicable providence, Pope John Paul II died on Saturday, April 2nd, 2005, while the anticipated Mass of the Divine Mercy, the feast he established, was celebrated by his bed. He himself would be canonized on the Feast of Divine Mercy, April 27th, 2014.

Pope St. John Paul II, promoter of the Divine Mercy, and St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, Secretary of Divine Mercy, Pray for us.